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How We
Can Help With
Vocational
Rehabilitation



How Social Security Can Help With Vocational Rehabilitation

The Social Security Administration (SSA) can help people with disabilities get the vocational rehabilitation services they need to return to work or to go to work for the first time. We can put them in touch with agencies that provide services such as job counseling, training and job placement. SSA doesn't provide these services, but we can help pay for them when certain conditions are met.

We can continue to assist a person with a disability even after he or she goes to work. There are special provisions of the law, called work incentives, which help the individual to continue working. These work incentives allow us to continue cash payments and health insurance coverage even though the individual has returned to work.

This pamphlet provides more information about how SSA can help people with disabilities successfully return to work or go to work for the first time.

Referring People With Disabilities To State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies

When a person files an application for disability benefits, specially trained employees at the state Disability Determination Services (DDS) office review the application to see whether the person's medical condition qualifies him or her for disability benefits. At the same time, they also evaluate the person's rehabilitation potential. If it appears that the person may benefit from vocational rehabilitation services, they refer the applicant to the state vocational rehabilitation agency.

SSA sends information about the applicant's medical condition and work history to the rehabilitation provider. Rehabilitation counselors evaluate this information. They may contact the person to obtain further information and may request that the individual come in for an interview.

At that time, the counselor will try to find out more about the person's interests and employment goals. Clients are given an opportunity to discuss how the counselor can work with them to achieve their job goals. If the counselor believes the vocational rehabilitation

agency can provide the rehabilitation services that are needed, the counselor and client will jointly develop a written plan describing the job goal and the services the vocational rehabilitation agency will provide to reach that goal. This written plan is tailored to the needs of the client.

Use Of Alternate Vocational Rehabilitation Service Providers

SSA first refers persons to the state vocational rehabilitation agency for consideration. If the state agency is unable to serve the individual, we may refer that individual to an alternate participant in our vocational rehabilitation program. An alternate participant is any nonstate public or private agency that is qualified to serve Social Security disability beneficiaries. Such providers must be licensed, certified or accredited to provide vocational rehabilitation services within their state and meet other requirements that assure us they can provide clients with the necessary help. SSA pays these alternate providers for the costs of their services under the same conditions that apply for state vocational rehabilitation agencies.

Paying Providers For Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The Social Security Act allows SSA to pay for vocational rehabilitation services they furnish to people receiving Social Security disability benefits or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments based on disability or blindness if certain conditions are met. The vocational rehabilitation services must result in the person's return to work for at least nine continuous months at a substantial earnings level. The earnings levels change from year to year. Check with your local Social Security office for current information.

Types Of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational rehabilitation providers furnish a wide variety of services to help people with disabilities return to work. These services are designed to provide the client with the training or other services that are needed to return to work, to enter a new line of work or to enter the workforce for the first time. Examples of the types of services that may be offered by vocational rehabilitation providers include:

- various types of tests and assessments to evaluate the client's physical or mental condition, skills and abilities;
- counseling and guidance, including counseling to family members;
- wheelchairs, specially modified vans, prosthetics and other devices to help restore the individual's availability to work;
- training;
- transportation;
- job placement;
- post-placement services; and
- other goods and services necessary to achieve the planned job goals of the person's rehabilitation program.

Refusal To Accept Rehabilitation Services

Most people with disabilities want to work and will cooperate with the rehabilitation provider during the course of their rehabilitation program. However, the law provides for the suspension of Social Security benefits if a person fails to cooperate with the rehabilitation agency without a good reason for doing so. If a rehabilitation provider offers services to a person with a disability, the person must accept the services to continue receiving Social Security benefits unless we determine that there is a good reason for not accepting services.

Benefits While Participating In A Vocational Rehabilitation Program

A person who medically recovers while participating in an approved rehabilitation or training program may continue to receive benefits until the vocational rehabilitation program ends if SSA finds that the program is likely to help the individual become self-supporting. This continuation of benefits is available to persons who participate in either an approved state or private vocational rehabilitation program.

Social Security Work Incentives

Once a person with a disability has returned to work, special rules called “work incentives” will help serve as a bridge from reliance on benefits to financial independence achieved by returning to work. With these incentives, the individual can continue to receive cash payments and health insurance coverage (for a period of time) until he or she is able to work regularly.

There are different work incentives for persons who receive Social Security disability and SSI benefits. There are also special work incentives for persons who are blind and for students with disabilities. The purpose of all of these work incentives is to provide support and assistance to people with disabilities while they attempt to work.

Some of the ways that these incentives help people with disabilities to work is by allowing them to:

- test the ability to work for a specified period of time without losing any benefits;
- deduct from earnings the cost of certain impairment-related work items or services needed to work in determining whether earnings are too high to continue receiving benefits;
- continue Medicare coverage if disability benefits stop because earnings are too high;
- continue to receive SSI payments until the earnings we count exceed the SSI limits; and
- continue Medicaid coverage if the person depends on Medicaid to work even if earnings exceed the SSI limits until the person's earnings are sufficient to replace lost benefits.

For More Information

Persons with a disability who want to work do not have to be referred to a rehabilitation agency or wait for an agency to contact them. They may contact the rehabilitation agency in their state directly at any time. Your Social Security office will be glad to provide the location and phone number of the nearest office of the state vocational rehabilitation agency. Individuals then can let the agency know of their interest in receiving rehabilitation services to help them return to work. The address and phone number of the state vocational rehabilitation agency also can be found in the phone book.

For more information about how work may affect disability benefits, call or visit any Social Security office. You may wish to ask for our publication *Working While Disabled—How We Can Help* (SSA Publication No. 05-10095) or *If You Are Blind—How We Can Help* (SSA Publication No. 05-10052). You can find the address and phone number of your local Social Security office in your phone book. You also can call our toll-free number, **1-800-772-1213**, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. any business day.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call our toll-free “TTY” number, 1-800-325-0778, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. business days.



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